

623
HUMILITY recommended.

IN A
SERMON
Preach'd before the
RIGHT HONOURABLE the
LORD MAYOR
AND THE
Court of Aldermen

IN THE
Cathedral Church of St. PAUL

April the 22d 1716.

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Treasurer of the said CATHEDRAL,
Rector of St. MARTIN's Ludgate, and
Chaplain to the Right Reverend Father
in God JOHN Lord Bishop of LONDON.

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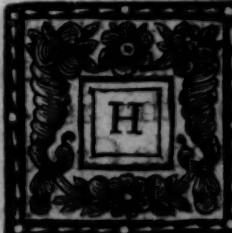


MDCCXV

1 COR. IV. vii.

Who maketh thee to differ from another?

And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it.



Umility as it is a Duty of Civil Life, under which View the Moralists have usually looked upon it, should seem to be founded on no Consideration more rationally than on that of the Equality Men are naturally born under with respect to each other. Since Human Nature is communicated without Disparity to all, and since nothing can be more destructive of Society, to support which is the great End of Nature's Law, than not to respect others as Men like our selves, than to over-

overlook or appear haughty towards them ; it is by Consequence a Precept of the same Law, that every Man use another as one who is naturally upon a Level with him.

Now this Command, this Rule of Equality is broken in upon by Pride, a Vice which makes Men regardless of their Fellow Creatures upon some supposed Excellency of theirs above them. And here, because a Value for themselves is wrought into the very Constitution of Mankind, and all, as was said, have an equal Title to Human Nature, with which that Passion bears date, in order to prevent the Excesses of it, which must inevitably create the greatest Confusion in Society, when each Member of it will have as good Pretensions to Arrogance as his Fellow ; it has ever been accounted a considerable Piece of Understanding to know how far, and upon what Grounds any one has a Right to esteem himself. The most sensible Opinion advanced upon this Subject seems to be, that the only reasonable Cause of valuing our selves arises from a right Use of our Free-will ; because, if we except the Actions which flow from that Power of the Mind there is nothing in us that can properly deserve Blame or Commendation. Hence all the Advantages of Riches, Honours, Strength, Wit, Learning, or the like, come not into the Account to make one *differ from another*, and he who raises a good Opinion of himself on any

any of those Foundations will be guilty of Pride, and upon this Foot he will have the Character of an humble Man, who from a Reflection on the common Infirmities of Human Nature, upon the Faults or Inadvertencies he has been guilty of, or obnoxious to formerly, or may be in Time to come, these falling not short of what he observes to be incident to and committed by those about him; and from a Sense that they all have the same Power over their Wills, and may all employ it as well as himself, sets not himself above any one whatever.

Thus the Consideration of that Equality of Nature there is among Men, by directing them to look not only on their own Things, but also on the Things of others, would abundantly serve to stifle their Pride; and by turning their Thoughts upon the common Weaknesses all are liable to without Distinction, teach them neither to undervalue their Brethren, nor to over-rate themselves, and might very well lay the Foundation of Humility taken as a social Virtue.

But in regard one is made to differ from another by the unequal Distribution of God's Gifts, which, however they are in most Instances extrinsical to a Man's Will, are too apt to heighten the innate Esteem he has for himself; and because another Object of this Grace, pecu-

peculiar to a religious Humility, is pointed to in the Words chosen for my Subject, and not only Riches and Honours, and the like, but even our *Souls*, and all the Powers of them, are *in the Hands of God*: I shall endeavour farther to establish the Duty, from the Contemplation of that Almighty Giver of all Gifts, and a View of the Sin and Folly of Men's boasting in any thing they have received. *Who maketh thee to differ, &c.*

The special Occasion of these Words, in Effect the main Argument of this First Epistle to the *CORINTHIANS*, was to put a Stop to their vain boasting on Account of the Learning and Eloquence of certain factious Teachers crept into that Church. The Apostle, having first shewed them that there was no good Reason to esteem them upon the Score of any such Advantages, for that the Gospel was not design'd to be propagated with *Wisdom of Words*, God having purposely chosen the *foolish Men* in the Account of the *World* to confound the *Wise*, ch. i. v. 27. that natural Human Abilities, Parts, or Wisdom, could never have reach'd this Way to Happiness, the Knowledge of which was entirely owing to God Almighty, to the End that *no Flesh should glory in his Presence*, v. 29. farther tells them, that, however they might be distinguished by those Accomplishments, yet did no Glory accrue to them on that Score, because they had those Gifts

Gifts only in the nature of Stewards and Servants, who had nothing but what they had received, and were accountable for : *Let a Man so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God.* And that, in whatever manner they preached the Gospel, they could not assume to themselves any Glory from thence, because the Success was wholly owing to GOD, and they but mere Men : *Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth : but GOD that giveth the Increase ; therefore let no Man glory in Men.*

Which Reasoning of St. Paul, as it serves to illustrate the Sence of the Text, so does it conduce to recommend Humility, and to expose Pride and Ostentation in a proper Light ; I shall therefore endeavour farther to establish the Duty from the Contemplation of God, and the Consideration of the Sin and Folly of Men's boasting in any thing they have received from him, as before proposed, with a particular View to this Representation.

And certainly, as nothing enters more into the Character of an humble Mind, than a just Sence of God's absolute Excellencies, and our absolute Dependance on him, so no Image can serve better to set forth the Reasonableness of improving that Temper, than a Survey of those Excellencies ; nothing more effectually lay open our own Meanness than his

Majesty. Indeed G O D's Attributes, in the Manner and full Extent of his enjoying them, are incomprehensible to us; but notwithstanding, whether we look upon them as such, or proceed by that only Method, whereby our Reason comes at any Notices concerning them, we have a forcible Argument for our Purpose. For,

First, If the Divine Perfections are disproportionate to the Powers of our Mind, and over-bear our weak Faculties, and must be owned to be Objects *far above out of our Sight*, infinitely too great for Human Thought to circumscribe, what is capable of giving us a greater Idea of their Transcendency? What more prevailing Argument can there be for *walking humbly with our God*, than that which this Reflection furnishes? Light inaccessible cannot but strike the Mind with the most awful Sentiments of his Majesty, who inhabits it, and induce us, like the *Seraphims*, Beings of the most enlarged Understandings, mention'd by the Prophet to attend G O D's Throne, to *cover our Faces* in the Presence of his Glory, and to make up in Praise and Veneration what we want in Knowledge.

And Secondly, If our Reason can gather some Conceptions of those bright Properties, but that no otherwise, than from the dim Resemblance of them in our selves; what leads us better into a sense

a sense of our own Meanness and Dependance? From what we have *receiv'd* we frame some Notions of the Honour, and by the Streams that flow to us are guided to the Spring whence they arise; but, if a Reflection upon what we find of those Excellencies in our own Persons exhibits a faint Draught of them in the Almighty; the Comparison it suggests must at the same time give us the most lively Image of our own Imperfections.

Thus God's Attributes considered either way become to us a Reason of Humility; God is incomprehensible only because our Faculties are narrow; and as the utter Incapacity we are under of *finding out the Almighty to perfection* in any Instance evidently discovers our Want of it: So, since all the Apprehensions Men have of any his communicable Excellencies, his Wisdom, his Power, his Goodness or the like, must be drawn from the Idea's they have of the same Qualities in themselves; this turn of their Thoughts must necessarily make them observe upon their own comparative Ignorance, or Weakness, or Depravity.

And who, that well examines into the Nature of God's Excellencies, can think he has Reason to value himself upon his own? Who that is under a Conviction of his Omnipotence, will *boast in his own Strength*, and not rather refer the Glory of it to its Original? Will say unto him:

him: *What dost thou?* And not rather readily submit to that Power, which he confessedly cannot controul? So, if God is of infinite Wisdom to contrive things, as well as of infinite Power to effect them; it will be an instance of Prudence, as well as Humility to be directed by him. Thus, if what he possesses eminently we partake of in a Degree infinitely imperfect; If *the weakness of God is stronger than Men, and the foolishness of God wiser than Men*; again, if what he enjoys independently we have only by communication from him; and *every good, and every perfect Gift cometh from above; where is the cause of boasting?* However we may differ from one another, who may glory in his Sight, whose Gifts found the Distinction?

That we have nothing but what we have received, No one methinks can be so much a Stranger to his own Condition, as not to be sensible of; that whatever we have received, whether the Gifts of Nature, or those Attainments Men are most apt to ascribe to their own procurement, such as Learning, or Knowledge, or Discretion in the conduct of Life, are all from God can be as little questioned. As to the Endowments we are born to, to doubt the receipt of them at his Hands, is absolutely to deny his Being, which our own, and the Preservation of it are the most palpable Evidences of: *He is not far from every one of us, for in him we live, and move, and have our being.* And with regard to every

every other Gift of what kind soever it be; the Reason we have from him will by the same Method easily convince us, that his Sovereignty reaches as wide as his Creation, and that what is formed by his Almighty word is directed and disposed of by his All-wise Providence. This we shall be yet farther satisfyed of, if we reflect that very many of those Hinges, whereon the Acquisitions we appear to have the best Title to a Property in entirely turn, are by Divine Appointment set above humane reach. For instance, if we except only Men's Virtue, a Claim they are generally less solicitous to assert their Right to; there is nothing which they can with better colour call their own than their Learning in the several Professions, as the Improvement of Knowledge is the effect of Study, and Labour, and the application of their Faculties; and yet what is more visible than that the attaining of this depends either upon their Condition in the World, or on their natural Talents; on a good Education, or easy Circumstances, or Quickness of parts, or Strength of Constitution, All which are God's Gifts unquestionably.

Thus it is a natural Presumption to impute Success in War to Humane Courage and Conduct; but whoever sets aside God's interposition in those Events certainly discovers too great a Confidence in the *Arm of Flesh*; and is chargeable with manifest Partiality in favour of Men's Schemes and Projects to the prejudice

Dice of God's Honour; for, besides that those Qualities are themselves palpably God's Gifts, nothing is more notorious than that Victory often depends upon a great variety of Occurrences, which no humane foresight can descry, or force prevent; and that nothing is more frequent than for the Wise and Brave to fail of Success, at the same time that the Coward triumphs, and the worst concerted Measures have a good Effect. So we are apt to ascribe Riches to the Address and Dexterity, or to the Care and Industry of Men; but whoever considers how much they turn, both as to the procuring, and the preserving of them, upon Chance, upon Times and Seasons which God has never put out of his own Power, will confess that he, who giveth Knowledge and Skill in all Learning and Wisdom, and Victory in the day of battle, giveth also to Man power to get wealth. So true is the wise Man's Remark; that the Race is not to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, neither yet Bread to the Wise, nor yet Riches to Men of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all. Eccles. ix. 11. From all which there cannot a better Inference be drawn than that of God himself by his Prophet: Therefore thus saith the Lord; let not the wise Man glory in his Wisdom, neither let the mighty Man glory in his might, let not the rich Man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth

knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise Loving Kindness, Judgment and Righteousness in the Earth. Jerem. ix. 23, 24.

Indeed to boast in any thing we have received as if we had not received it, is in the highest Degree both Criminal and imprudent, which was the second branch of my Argument. *First*, It is criminal; because, besides that every instance of such boasting is an Act of Sacrilege, to rob God of a Tribute due to him; it is also impiously to admit a Rival of him into our Breasts, and to make an Idol of his Blessings. He that terminates his views in his own Possessions or Accomplishments, and so sets his Heart upon the Figure any thing he has received gives him in the Eye of the World, makes a God of his Riches or Reputation. To sit down with sufficiency satisfied with the prospect of what we enjoy, discovers an unconcernedness to enquire after the Author of it, and is a real mark of Irreligion. To ascribe the Success of what we engage in to our own Sagacity or Prudence or Strength is to a degree to take the Government of the World out of the Hands of Providence, and effectually to put a stop to all intercourse with Heaven; in a word, by letting our Minds be taken up by our Endowments, we leave no room for the most obvious, most prevailing Idea of a Deity to remain in them: That deducible from his

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Manifestation of himself in his Goodness towards us ; and by an unaccountable perverseness make his Beneficence, design'd expressly to solicit our Love, and to engage us in his Service, to draw away our Minds from him. To be puffed up then by the Divine Benefits to the neglect of him who conferred them, which is ever the Consequence of such Pride, is in effect to set God's Creatures in competition with him, and thereby to eclipse his Glory, a Center to which every Line both of Nature and Religion is pointed ; to bring to nought the chief purpose of his Providence, and to dissolve one of the strickest Tyes we are under to the Worship of him.

Nor is boasting in what we have received only criminal, but also, *secondly*, very imprudent.

He who values any Gifts, cannot but desire they should be continued to him, and without alloy, and that the more in proportion as his esteem of them is greater. Now if it be considered how infinitely we depend upon God, as for the Gifts themselves, so both for the Security and the Blessing of them ; and that Humility is represented in Scripture to have a peculiar Title to God's Favour and Protection, and *humbling the Haughty* to be a work he takes a pleasure in ; and that to those, who thankfully receive them at his Hands, and

and to those only God's Gifts become Blessings either real or lasting; it must appear to be the part of Wisdom in point of Interest as well as Duty to be humble, to entertain such a sense of our selves as will most probably incline God to illustrate and perpetuate our Fortunes; and therefore a foolish Confidence to that degree to discard all Thoughts of our Dependance on him, as to glory in our selves, or any our Abilities. Since *God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble*, and his Gifts, however in themselves valuable, are as to our Tenure of them very precarious, and without the Divine Influence and Direction die away, or, which is worse, are *kept for the owners thereof to their hurt*; Since we see the brightest, most admir'd, nay most useful Accomplishments, for instance of Body or Mind, do often insensibly become obscure, or contemptible, or turn to the prejudice of the Possessor, and that by nothing so naturally as the infusion of Pride; it will be a piece of the greatest Prudence to get out that stain, and in gratitude to glorify *God in our bodies and in our souls, which are his*, as the best method to prevail with him so to direct the Abilities he vouchsafes to give, that they may not prove altogether useless, or but the more eminent and conspicuous Evils.

And as it is prudent to refer the Glory of God's Gifts back to the Fountain of them, in

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regard of our Dependance on him, lest the Ingratitude provoke him to direct the Streams to other Channels, or to suffer them to flow to us to our prejudice; so is it likewise a wise part in respect of Men, upon whose Applause and Approbation our Characters turn. For if we would render the Distinction our good Qualities give either more illustrious or more durable, the best way undoubtedly is not to set them off too much our selves; Merit is ever most admired, where there is the least Ostentation of it, while all Men conspire to detract from his Praises, who appears to be full of them himself; of which this obvious Reason is assignable: That the Vain, by appearing to be wholly taken up with themselves, discover a Contempt of others, who therefore in just return are pleased with mortifying them. Whereas the Meek and Humble give no such Umbrage, they alarm not the wakeful Jealousy of self-love; and on that account easily meet with that Respect they are as ready to give, with those Commendations they do not court, or ever abuse to the Disparagement of those they are concern'd with. There is indeed no Vice raises the aversion of the World more than Vanity; no Address makes Men better receiv'd, than that which those related Virtues Modesty and Humility form; such a Cast does the Tincture of Pride give, that it renders the best Personal Qualifications odious; such are the Graces of Humility,

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as to engage in Favour of the most Indifferent. Thus nothing so much defeats its own Purpose, the Desire of Glory, as Pride and Arrogance, and none are so secure of attaining that End as those who are least solicitous to pursue it.

Since then Man, as well as God, *resists the Proud*, and with-holds his Esteem in Proportion to the Forwardness with which it seems to be demanded, whatever Right to it any Merit may give, it must be a foolish Part to prosecute the Title by a Claim which will certainly destroy the Cause.

And as the Humble are agreeable to all about them, so will they be also always easy to themselves; and, as our blessed Saviour promises them, *find Rest to their Souls*. Peace of Mind indeed is universally the Reward of every Virtue, but this contributes to it in a particular manner, as it is the Principle of all others. A Sense of our Corruption and Dependance upon God Almighty is the first, and a necessary Step to Conversion; from which he that boasts in himself will ever be far removed; nor is that Man capable of Repentance, who is not disposed to acknowledge that this also is God's Gift. A lively Concern for all our Imperfections, a Temper utterly inconsistent with Pride, is absolutely necessary to a sincere Reformation; and therefore those

Satisfactions a Person seems to have, who is pleas'd with himself, and who groundlessly with the *Pharisee* thanks God he is *not a Sinner as other Men are*, cannot be solid and real.

Besides, the Humble are not only blest with the joys of a quiet Conscience, flowing from a well-grounded Expectation of God's future Benefits, but he enjoys also a constant Calm within his Breast with regard to the present Condition God has placed him in. Whatever his Circumstances are, tho' he *differ* from others only in Misfortune, he is ever easy under it, from a just Sense that every Incident of his Life is under the Direction of infinite Power, which he therefore cannot resist, of infinite Wisdom and Goodness, which therefore he ought in Prudence to submit to. This join'd with the modest Opinion he has of himself, without Exception the best Preventive against the Force of Impatience and Discontent, lays the Storms of a restless Ambition, and renders the greatest Temporal Infelicities and Disappointments less shocking.

Would we then find Favour with God and Man, let us not be too favourable to our selves, thus we shall *learn both how to abound and how to suffer Need*, and whether we receive *Good at God's Hand or Evil*, since *Afflictions also spring not out of the Ground*, be freed from the Disturbances which Want on the one hand, and

and the no less uneasy Transports which Affluence creates on the other.

Upon the whole, As we have from what has been said the most engaging Inducements to Humility, particularly from the Advantages arising from the Exercise of it, Arguments of all other the most prevailing over Mankind, so are we hereby let into the readiest Method of attaining it, in that we are put upon retiring into our selves, and considering what dependent Creatures we are; for certainly nothing promotes Pride so much as want of Consideration in the Person tainted with it; as the Frame of Mind here recommended is in a great measure the natural Result of Thought and Reflection. If we enter into a Detail of those Things we are distinguished from one another by, and look into the Nature and real Worth of what we are most apt to value our selves upon, as Wit, or Beauty, or Riches, or Learning. Again, If, in observing upon our selves, we always compare our selves with those, who are reputed most eminent for those Advantages or Accomplishments, with those above, not those beneath us, we shall find little reason to boast either on Account of the Things themselves, or of our enjoying them in a greater Degree than other Men. If we consider especially *who* it is that *maketh* us *differ from* others, and that there is nothing which we have *not received*, that

that the *Gifts* we have differing from one another are all but so many Talents committed to us by God Almighty in the nature of a Trust, we cannot believe the Glory of them redounds to any, but that Lord whose they are, and to whom we are only Stewards of and Accomptants for them, and that should the *Measure* whereby those *Gifts* are meted out to us be press'd down and running over, yet shall we be so far from thinking this *Abundance* which God giveth to be Matter of boasting, that it will on the contrary incline us to be the more humble, to consider that our Account becomes thereby but the larger, and consequently the Discharge of it the more difficult.

Lastly, Let us look unto Jesus, the Author of our Faith; and while we give thanks for that unspeakable *Gift* (which in passing Humility alone can make us capable of embracing as we ought) Let us consider Him, as more expressly inculcating, as exhibiting a more remarkable Example of this Virtue, than of any other of his *Gospel*. In his one Sermon upon the Mount, he promises to *the poor in Spirit the Kingdom of Heaven, and to the meek that they shall inherit the Earth*. Occasionally exposing the Pride of the Pharisees, he, who had been always among his Disciples *as he that serveth*, teaches them a different Lesson, and thus calls them to a conformity with him: *He that is greatest*

est amongst you shall be your Servant. That Invitation of his: *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart,* discovers he recommended himself to the Imitation of his Followers in a particular manner in this Instance. And certainly those wonderful and amazing Condescensions of the Eternal Son of God to become Man, and *dwell among us;* of him, who had at his command all the Treasures of Heaven, to live on Earth in so low a Fortune; and suffer the brightness of God's Glory, and the express Image of his Person to be obscur'd and defaced by the Infirmities inseparable from our Condition; and at the last to submit to a Death of so much pain and ignominy, are precedents of this Virtue not only exceeding all other, but which in Nature admit not a possibility of being come up to. If he, to whom it was given to have Life in himself, resigned that peculiar Privilege, and suffered Death upon the Cross, that all Mankind should follow the Example of his great Humility, let not us, whose Gifts are at best precarious and dependent, and fall infinitely short of his, whose are all Things which the Father has, so far, so unreasonably frustrate this his Purpose, as to be proud of them; but rather, if we will glory, let us with our Apostle glory of the Things which concern our Infirmities; for when we are weak then are we strong. Since him, who differed from us in a Degree inconceivably superiour to any Distinction discoverable amongst our selves, God made like unto us, lower than the Angels,

gels, to crown him with Glory and Worship; let us in like manner, having such a Pattern before us, and knowing the End of such Conversation, as St. Peter adviles, humble our selves under the mighty Hand of God, that he may exalt us in due time, that we also may receive a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away. I shall close all with our Apostle's Exhortation to the *Philippians*, which is to this Purpose pertinent, and of very easy Application to the whole, and is beyond Expression moving; *Let nothing be done through Strife, or Vain-glory, but in lowliness of Mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every Man on his own things, but every Man also on the things of others. Let this Mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a Servant, and was made in the likeness of Men: And being found in fashion as a Man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a Name which is above every Name.*

To that Name let every Knee bowe, of things in Heaven, and things in Earth, and things under the Earth; and let every Tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

